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THESIS

**PRECURSOR TO CONFLICT:
THE CULTURAL RE-CODING OF SERBIA**

by

John Frederick Patten II

March 1996

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**PRECURSOR TO CONFLICT:
THE CULTURAL RE-CODING OF SERBIA**

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Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1981

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

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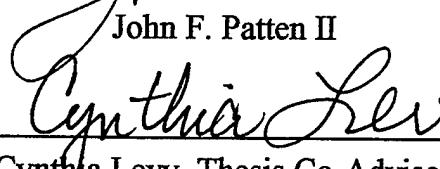
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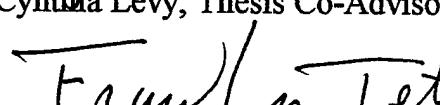
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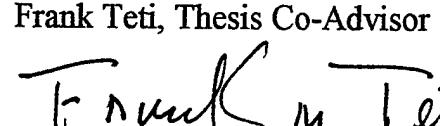
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the origins of the conflict which engulfed the former Yugoslavia in 1991. Findings will indicate that the violence within this culturally diverse and historically multi-ethnic region of Europe was not driven by ancient ethnic sentiments, nor was it a “civil war” between “traditional tribal rivals” --fighting for “hundreds of years”--; but was rather the direct result of a within-group (intra-state/inter-cultural) political struggle. The study will demonstrate that the violence witnessed by the international community can be traced to the destructive strategies adopted by a threatened status-quo elite for political survival. Specifically, the source of this tragedy can be traced to the post-Tito struggle for power in the face of political and economic reform; with primary responsibility for the deterioration falling squarely on the shoulders of the Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević. Through extensive manipulation of the Serbian culture and its historical symbols, President Milošević created an external threat to Serbia, united the Serbs around him in a common fight for survival, and based his domestic and foreign policies on the defeat of this fabricated threat. Far from an inevitable and “spontaneous combustion” of ethnic hatreds, the conflict began as a coldly premeditated, systematic, and violent power drive; fueled by hyper-nationalism and employing “ethnic cleansing” as Milošević sought to create and dominate an ethnically pure “Greater Serbia”.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past several years, the world has been bombarded and bewildered by myriad interpretations and analyses concerning the Balkan violence. Clearly the bloodiest war in Europe since WWII, the ongoing conflict in Bosnia-Hercegovina has destroyed the Yugoslav state, leveled entire cities, and resulted in over 250,000 casualties and millions of Yugoslavs displaced and homeless. Various experts, intellectuals and statesmen have described the conflict as an ancient civil war between backward and far-off clans; and the international community continues to express alarm at this "European" conflagration raging in the region between Italy and Greece.

What are the root causes of violent conflict throughout this culturally diverse and historically multi-ethnic region of Europe? Are there adequate explanations for the systematic destruction of the cosmopolitan society of Sarajevo --before the war, a shining example of multi-ethnic, intermarried and religiously mixed culture-- a Balkan ideology that had stood against the division of its people into segregated groups for two generations?

This study will argue that the conflict is not one of ancient ethnic sentiments or of "civil war" between "traditional tribal rivals" --fighting for "hundreds of years"-- nor is it one of external security concerns; but is rather the direct result of within-group (intra-state/inter-cultural) conflict. It is the result of a rational program of domestic conflict waged along ethno-cultural lines by a threatened powerful elite; which embraced and subsequently nurtured a budding nationalist movement, deliberately and systematically manipulating and provoking it to create ethnic and cultural cleavages within the region. The paper will demonstrate that the violence witnessed by the international community can be traced to the destructive strategies adopted by a

threatened status-quo elite for political survival.¹

The Balkans indeed have a historically rich and culturally complex past. Yet, despite this “thousand year old history”, the current conflict is one of modern political survival. In fact, the source of the tragedy can be traced to the post-Tito struggle for power in the face of political and economic reform; with primary responsibility for the deterioration falling squarely on the shoulders of the Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević. Far from an inevitable and “spontaneous combustion” of ethnic hatreds, the conflict began as a coldly premeditated, systematic, and violent power drive by Milošević, fueled by hyper-nationalism; and employing “ethnic cleansing” as the primary means by which Milošević sought to dominate an ethnically pure “Greater Serbia”.

As chief functionary of the declining Yugoslav Communist regime, Milošević embraced and became the voice of Serbian hyper-nationalism; adopting a “grand strategy” which included the cultural re-coding and manipulation of his society in order to emphasize ethno-nationalism as the only politically relevant identity, and depicting potential political rivals as dangerous threats to the very existence of all Serbs and Serbia. Beginning in 1987, he intentionally created (rather than responded to) threats to his “Serbian nation” by purposefully provoking and fostering the outbreak of violent nationalist conflict along ethno-cultural lines² --even in areas with histories of successful inter-marriage and inter-ethnic relations. Serbian President Milošević created an external

¹One of the theoretical pillars of this thesis will be anchored on the hypotheses of V.P. Gagnon as outlined in his paper, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp.130-166, Winter 1994/95.

²The phenomenon of “Serbian Nationalism” will be examined vis-a-vis the definitions suggested by Steven Van Evera in his paper, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 5-39, Spring 1994.

threat to Serbia, united the Serbs around him in a common fight for survival, and based his domestic and foreign policies on the fabricated threat.

Milošević --Catalyst for Crisis

Slobodan Milošević represents a powerful synthesis or, more precisely “symbiosis”³, of Yugoslav Communism (political conservatism, support for centralism, and resistance to meaningful change), Serbian nationalism (desire for a sovereign “Greater Serbia”), Serbian Christian Orthodoxy, and the powerful Yugoslav People’s Army -and his personal management of this symbiosis has a profound effect on developments in Yugoslavia. Warren Zimmerman describes Milošević as “the slickest con man in the Balkans”.⁴ Others have commented that he is a “consummate tactician, political chameleon, master of the bob and weave and, for all that, the key player on the Balkan scene...”⁵ One might also add: “ruthless opportunist and violent destabilizer of the Yugoslav Federation”, whose cry of “strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia” has ripped the region into a patchwork of shell-shocked Southern Slavs.

The Red/Brown/Black/Gray Symbiosis

Milošević’s goals have focused primarily on gaining full control of the Serbian state, and creating a unified country under Serbian domination, with a semi-free market and a semi-democratic (ex-communist) government under his personal tutelage. His

³As described by Professor Norman Cigar, in his book *Genocide in Bosnia - The Policy of “Ethnic Cleansing”*, Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1995.

⁴Zimmerman, Warren, “The Last Ambassador,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 2-20, March/April 1995.

⁵Karsten Prager, “The Balkans: Milošević Plays Peacekeeper,” *Time Magazine*, vol. 146, no. 3, 17 July 1993.

initial drive consisted of reestablishing Serbian control over the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo.

Control of the Press

One of the primary means by which Milošević has pursued his goals has been via the Serbian media (print, broadcast and TV). In the following passage Sabrina Ramet offers a glimpse of Serbian press manipulation and dissemination of nationalist propaganda:

"To establish power in Serbia, Milošević thought he needed a pliant press. He therefore fired a number of editors and journalists at the prestigious *Politika* publishing house, and the daily papers *Politika* and *Politika ekspres* as well as the weekly magazines *Duga* and *NIN* became mere mouthpieces for Milošević's policies... Publications appeared which were the direct result of Milošević's nationalist policies... in 1987 a book was published which attempted to link the Vatican with the misdeeds of the fascist Ustase of World War II --clearly an attempt to undermine the Catholic Church, the cultural champion of the Serbs' arch-rivals, the Croats."⁶

The Intelligentsia (Legitimation)

The Serbian intelligentsia played a leading part in the intellectual and cultural "re-nationalization" of Serbia. From the earliest stages of his drive, Milošević controlled and manipulated the Serbian intellectual community, specifically the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). Considered by many to be the "spiritual standard-bearers" for Serbian nationalism, members of SANU have untiringly published a number of inflammatory documents and memorandums, and bear primary responsibility for the cynical and nihilistic brand of Serbian nationalism --generating mass self-pity, anger and hatred.

⁶Sabrina P. Ramet, "Serbia's Slobodan Milošević: A profile", *Orbis* vol. 35, no. 1, p. 97, Winter 1991.

Serbian Nationalism (Brown)

Nationalism has no rival either in mobilizing the masses against a common threatening enemy or in its capacity to inspire self-sacrifice in defense of the home nation, and Milošević clearly recognized this potential source of power. The initial and most significant of his political concessions might be described as the “Red/Brown” symbiosis --or the Communist/Nationalist merger⁷. By embracing and co-opting the powerful force of Serbian nationalism (loyalty to “Greater Serbia”), Milošević directed the cultural wellspring of Serbian society into the service of the state, and more precisely, into a personal force for self-preservation, and power acquisition. He fanned the psychological flames of the Serbian masses for personal aggrandizement.

Serbian Orthodox Church (Black)

Another carefully cultivated and essential element of the symbiosis has been the Serbian Orthodox church. Long mistreated and ignored, the church suddenly found itself glorified in Milošević’s Serbian press. Priests began to participate in nationalist demonstrations, exposing the alleged evils of Catholicism and Mohammedanism, serving to further increase the cultural distance between the Balkan communities.

The Yugoslav People’s Army (Gray)

Formerly the protector of Yugoslavia as a whole --not particular nationalist groups-- the (gray-uniformed) pre-Milošević Yugoslav People’s Army was considered dogmatic, conservative and anti-democratic. However, through favorable press coverage and political nurturing, and with an overwhelming number of Serbian officers, the army eventually became the fighting arm of Serbian nationalism; and it was under the direct control of Milošević at the outbreak of hostilities with Croatia in 1991.

In the Wake of Milošević’s “Greater Serbia”

The international community has witnessed the ruthless and violent conflict within the former Yugoslavia during the past several years. Several questions come to mind:

⁷Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia - The Policy of “Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 32.

How effectively has Milošević been able to move toward his “Greater Serbia”? What was the Serbian strategy for regaining (or acquiring) Serbian territory? Is this action really “genocide”, or a legitimate attempt to liberate the Serbian people throughout Yugoslavia?

In March 1989, the CIA concluded an assessment of “atrocities” which had been committed in Bosnia. The report concludes that:

“90 percent of the acts of “ethnic cleansing” were carried out by Serbs (and leading Serbian politicians almost certainly played a role in the crimes... in a systematic attempt to eliminate all traces of other ethnic groups from their territory... the systematic nature of the Serbian actions strongly suggest that Pale and perhaps Belgrade exercised a carefully veiled role in the purposeful destruction and dispersal of non-Serb populations... it makes clear with concrete evidence that there was a conscious, coherent and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of Muslims, through murders torture and imprisonment... a premeditated attack on Bosnia’s Muslim population... particularly intense in the towns of Prijedor, Banja Luka, Zvornik, Bijeljina, Vlasenica, Foca and Trebinje... with an intensity, sustained orchestration and scale... which pales to the alleged atrocities committed by the Croatian and Bosnian forces.”⁸

What might be done to stem future ethnic violence? Clearly, the international community must remain vigilant, recognize the early warning signs of pending regional catastrophe, and act early and decisively with diplomatic, economic, and even military force to curtail the violence. Moreover, an intensive “information campaign”, directed at the Serbian people might have precluded the violence.

The lessons from the Yugoslav conflict, especially regarding hyper-nationalist manipulation by empowered elites, must not be soon forgotten.

⁸Roger Cohen, “CIA Report on Bosnia Blames Serbs for 90% of the War Crimes”, *New York Times*, p. 1, 9 March 1995.

GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

In Serbo-Croat:

- c --is pronounced 'ts' as in *mats* or *tsar*
- č --is 'tch' (hard) as in *chore*, *archer* or *match*
- ć --is 'tj' (soft) as in the 't' sound in *tune* or *future*; often found at the end of proper names.
- dj --is 'dg' as in *bridge*, *jet* or *jeans*; the pronunciation of 'dž' is almost identical
- h --is guttural, as in the Scottish *loch*
- j --is 'y' as in *yes* or *Yugoslavia*
- lj --is 'liyuh' like the middle sound of *million*
- nj --is 'ny' like *canyon*, or *new*
- š --is 'sh' like *shore* or *sharp*
- ž --is 'zh' like *leisure*, *pleasure* or *Zhivago*

All vowels are short. Other letters are pronounced as in English. Shorter words are stressed on the first syllable, and longer words are usually stressed on the third syllable from the end: i.e. Milošević.

I. INTRODUCTION

“For scholars, Bosnia is an analytical nightmare of conflicting historical claims, political agendas, and strategic ambitions; not surprisingly, differences among interpretations are legion.”¹

“Of course, I assure everyone that Serbia will not in any way abuse its numerical size nor endanger anyone in [any] way.” --Slobodan Milošević, 1990²

“I believe that Greater Serbia [Velika Srbija] --or Serbia, as the state belonging to the Serbian people and encompassing all our cultural and ethnic space-- is close to the heart of every Serb.” --Radovan Karadzic, 1991³

In January 1993, President William Clinton described the Balkan conflict as “the most frustrating and complex foreign policy issue in the world today.” Secretary of State Warren Christopher has claimed that it is the “problem from hell”.⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Carter, describes the conflict as “a moral and political calamity of historic proportions” and expresses alarm at this ongoing “European” debacle.⁵ Even today, as commentators and pundits debate the “slippery slope” of the Balkans, the world continues to discover that there are no easy answers to the Yugoslav question.

¹Robin Allison Remington, “Bosnia: The Tangled Web,” *Current History*, p. 364, November 1993.

²President Milošević at the January 21, 1990, session of the LCY Commission for the Reform of the Political System, cited from Sabrina P. Ramet’s, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962-1991*, 2nd Edition, p. 225, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992.

³Interview with Radovan Karadzic by Dada Vujasinovic, “Drzava koja se razmnozava” (A State Which Is Multiplying Itself), *Duga*, (Belgrade), p. 19, 26 October-10 November 1991.

⁴Paul Lewis, “U.S. Seeks Tougher Sanctions,” *New York Times*, p. A15, 7 April 1993.

⁵Zbigniew Brzezinski, “After Srebrenica,” *The New Republic*, p. 20, 7 August, 1995.

Under Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito it was said that that the Balkan state consisted of seven neighbors, six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets and one country. The region is indeed historically, culturally and politically complex. Since the violence began in June of 1991, over 250,000 Yugoslavs have been killed and perhaps as many as 2.3 million may have been displaced from their homes; and, as this thesis will note, the world has stood idle throughout most of the premeditated and systematic "ethnic cleansing" of an entire culture.

The peacekeeping effort within the former Yugoslavia has been substantial. The UN force on the ground in Bosnia --approximately 22,500 men and women (UNPROFOR, UNHCR, UNMO)-- was the largest deployment since the Korean war. NATO has experienced its first out-of-area action during the extensive Operations "Deny Flight", "Sharp Guard" and "Deliberate Force"; and with the current deployment of the NATO "Implementation Forces" (IFOR), the prospects for long-term Western involvement in the area are significant.

Yet, despite the presence of a potentially formidable international force in the area, the world community has witnessed (via CNN) widespread and prolonged violations to human rights; and the credibility, reputation and resolve of the leading international security institutions (UN, EU, WEU, NATO, CSCE/OSCE) have collapsed at the feet of the purported "New World Order". Today, even after the marathon negotiating sessions at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, the chances for a wider war remain present; Macedonia, Albania, and even Greece and Turkey might easily be consumed in the conflagration. Most significantly, throughout the conflict, in a series of "half-measures and empty threats" from UN and NATO leaders, the West has lost essential credibility as a post Cold-War world leader in an ever more dangerous international environment.

Although the U.S. has strong historical, political, economic, social, and cultural ties to Europe --a majority of Americans claim European ancestry or ethnic origin.⁶ The Balkan

⁶In the 1990 census, 57% of the total population indicated European ancestries. Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Strategic Assessment 1995*, p. 40, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1995.

conflict has divided and frustrated a bevy of American politicians, diplomats and warriors; and as we continue to experience accelerated regional conflict throughout the world, the lessons of the Balkan debacle should be carefully analyzed and not repeated. This thesis will specifically examine the origins of this bewildering conflict.

II. METHODOLOGY

The nature of the ongoing Balkan conflict presents the researcher with several significant challenges. The great libraries of Sarajevo are demolished, most reliable native scholars have been effectively silenced or corrupted, and travel in-country is still limited for obvious reasons. In addition, the accurate information which does leak out is often written in Serbo-Croat --the main Yugoslav language-- and one is often constrained by rough translations or summaries of critical documents. Most primary source literature disseminated by the Serbian Ministry of Information --written in English to facilitate Western consumption-- is, as this thesis will demonstrate, simply Serbian propaganda and disinformation. The publications available commercially to the fledgling Western researcher contain a wide assortment of material, some extremely well researched and compelling, but most from dubious sources containing inaccurate, skewed and highly subjective interpretations.

Given these constraints, this thesis, a qualitative historical analysis of domestic Serbian political development during the late 1980's and early 1990's, is based on primary and secondary source documents and interviews: books, periodicals and scholarly journals on current events and Balkan history; UN Security Council Resolutions, reports and documents; NATO Communiqués; daily newspapers and press releases; and U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) publications.

The notes and bibliography contain most of the premier resources available on Yugoslavia today, and the author wishes to specially thank two "Yugo-professionals", Professors Norman Cigar and Sabrina P. Ramet for their advice and encouragement. Some of the other outstanding authors include: Laura Silber, Christopher Bennett, V.P Gagnon, Jr., Steven Van Evera, Aleksa Djilas, Noel Malcolm, Roy Gutman, David Rieff, Mark Almond, Albert Wohlstetter, and Roger Cohen from the *New York Times*.

Also, although recent literature seems to indicate that in-country Balkan experience produces bizarre biases depending upon assignment and location, the author will claim 3 months of personal experience as a member of NATO's Bosnian "Deny Flight" strike

planning staff at Vicenza, Italy, in May-July of 1994. Lastly, special thanks to the level-headed professionals within the National Security Affairs Department at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School --particularly Professors Cynthia Levy, Frank Teti, and David Yost-- for patiently allowing this A-6 Bombardier to wander the labyrinthine corridors of Yugoslav politics.

III. PURPOSE

For the past several years, the world has been bombarded and bewildered by myriad interpretations and analyses concerning the Balkan violence. Clearly the bloodiest war in Europe since WWII, the ongoing conflict in Bosnia-Hercegovina has destroyed the Yugoslav state, leveled entire cities, and resulted in over 250,000 casualties and millions of Yugoslavs displaced and homeless. Various experts, intellectuals and statesmen have described the conflict as an ancient civil war between backward and far-off clans; and the international community continues to express alarm at this European "Backyard War" raging in the region between Italy and Greece. Others claim that the war, a conflict among morally equivalent tribes, is too complex for outsiders to understand or resolve --the locals (so the logic goes) have, after all, been fighting for thousands of years, and the Serbs fought on the side of the Western Allies during WWII!

What is the root cause of violent conflict throughout this culturally diverse and historically multi-ethnic region of Europe? Is there a logical explanation, a central event --a spark-- which caused friends, neighbors and even families to take up arms against each other after 3 generations of multi-cultural coexistence? Are there adequate explanations for the ethnic implosion and systematic murder of the cosmopolitan culture of Sarajevo --site of the 1984 Winter Olympics, and before the war, a shining example of multi-ethnic, intermarried and religiously mixed culture-- a Balkan ideology that had stood against the division of its people into segregated groups for almost 50 years?

T.D. Allman offers us a glimpse of the region before the violence began:

"Yugoslavia had tourism, heavy industry; it was a food-surplus nation. Its new freeways linked the rest of the European Community with Greece, Turkey, and the export markets of the Middle East. The totems of an emerging consumer society were everywhere: new gas stations, motels, housing developments, and discos and sidewalk cafes in the villages. Most impressive were the large private houses covering the roadside hills. Before the

killing started practically everybody, it seems, was just finishing a new house, or had just bought a new car.”⁷

What, then, *really happened* to all of this? Confusion as to the nature and origins of the ongoing Balkan violence has been widespread, to say the least. This thesis will argue that the conflict is not one of ancient ethnic sentiments or of “civil war” between “traditional tribal rivals” --fighting for “hundreds of years”-- nor is it one of external (international) security concerns. It is rather the direct result of within-group (intra-state/inter-cultural) conflict. It is the result of a rational program of domestic conflict waged along ethno-cultural lines by a threatened powerful elite; an elite which embraced and subsequently nurtured a budding nationalist movement, deliberately and systematically manipulating and provoking it to create ethnic and cultural cleavages within the region. The thesis will demonstrate that the violence witnessed by the international community can be traced to the destructive strategies adopted by a status-quo elite for political survival. Furthermore, this threatened leadership rationally initiated a “grand strategy” of culturally re-coding its own society in order to emphasize ethno-nationalism as the only politically relevant identity; with potential political rivals depicted as dangerous threats to the very existence of the nation.⁸

More specifically, the Serbian leadership, beginning in 1987, intentionally created (rather than responded to) threats to the “Serbian nation” by purposefully provoking and fostering the outbreak of violent nationalist conflict along ethno-cultural lines --even (and especially) in areas with histories of inter-marriage and positive inter-ethnic relations.⁹

⁷T.D. Allman; Quoted by Christopher Bennett in: *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse - Causes, Course and Consequences*, p. 1, NY University Press, New York, 1995.

⁸For a particularly germane analysis of the Serbian domestic political situation see: V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 130-166, Winter 1994/95 .

⁹The phenomenon of “Serbian Nationalism” will be examined vis-a-vis the definitions suggested by Steven Van Evera in his paper, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 5-39, Spring 1994 .

The beginning of the current Balkan conflict can be traced to the post-Tito struggle for power in the face of democratic political and liberal economic reform. Primary responsibility for the tragic deterioration falls squarely on the shoulders of the Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević --and his quest for power within the domestic Yugoslav political arena.

To retain and rebuild his waning political influence, Milošević embraced a particularly violent strain of Serbian nationalism, created an external threat to the Serbian nation, --essentially all “non-Serbs” throughout Yugoslavia-- united his terrified people around him in a common fight for survival, and based his domestic and foreign policies on overcoming this fabricated threat.

Far from an inevitable and “spontaneous tribal combustion” of ethnic hatreds, the conflict began as a coldly premeditated, systematic, and violent power drive by Milošević, fueled by hyper-nationalism-turned-xenophobia. “Ethnic cleansing” became the primary means by which Milošević continues to seek dominance of an ethnically (and politically) homogenous “Greater Serbia”.

IV. SERBIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

A. CULTURE

Webster's International Dictionary describes culture as "the body of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits constituting a distinct complex of tradition of racial (ethnic), religious, or social group".¹⁰ One might also define it as collectively held semi-conscious or unconscious images, assumptions, "codes", and "scripts" which define the external environment. These codes, images and scripts enable a group to "cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration."¹¹ Clifford Geertz proposes that "cultural assumptions constitute a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life".¹²

Aleksa Djilas explains that within the mixture of South Slavs (Yugoslavs) which comprised the former Yugoslavia:

"The various groups also had separate national ideologies (or cultures) based on collective historical memories and state traditions, some going back to medieval times, that were often mixed with legends and myths. Like elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe there was a strong tendency to glorify one's own group as heroic and creative and to see others in stereotypes of cowardice and backwardness."¹³

Sebastian Green further states that "dominant subcultures can impose cultural forms on other groups, manipulate them, or convince other subcultures that these dominant cultural

¹⁰Webster's Third International Dictionary, p. 552, Merriam-Webster, Springfield, MA, 1986.

¹¹Johnston, Alastair Iain, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 44, Spring 1995.

¹²Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 89, Basic Books, New York, 1973.

¹³Aleksa Djilas, "Yugoslavia's Trap of Ethnic Confrontation," *New York Times*, 7 July 1991.

forms are in fact their own forms. In this sense, cultural forms can be designed to preempt challenges to the status quo".¹⁴

B. STRATEGIC CULTURE

Geertz further describes "strategic culture" as "an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious."¹⁵

Although this definition applies primarily to "interstate" scenarios, it might also serve to describe inter-ethnic affairs within a polity, particularly during periods of significant political conflict. Furthermore, although strategic culture implies consistent and unique long-term behavior by a given state, this is not to say that it is not immutable or vulnerable to manipulation.

C. THE SERBIAN CASE

Based on the above definitions of "culture" and "strategic culture", the question arises as to whether the conflict in Yugoslavia is indeed grounded on a long tradition of Slavic inter-cultural rivalry, or rather, it is the result of a conscious effort by an entrenched status-quo elite to preserve and enhance its political hegemony through the manipulation of the efficacy of war? Or both....

Serbian strategic culture did not (initially) provide the catalyst for disaster. In an effort to overcome competing strategic tendencies (post-Tito domestic political and economic reform), and to maintain a hegemonic power-base within the former Yugoslavia, the state rationally manipulated the Serbian culture, and indeed altered the strategic culture, to garner political legitimacy and popular support. By invoking the ghosts and myths of

¹⁴Sebastian Green, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, p. 19, vol. 18, no. 2, 1988.

¹⁵Johnson, p. 46 (Emphasis added).

history and tradition, the status-quo regime sought to rally popular support and deflect popular pressure for reform. After almost 35 years of peaceful multi-cultural and multi-ethnic coexistence within Yugoslavia, the Serbian state unleashed a devastating “nationalist genie”; tapping and amplifying long dormant cultural episodes, myths and threats. Through careful media manipulation, the political and intellectual discourse essentially re-wove the very fabric of Serbian strategic culture. Indeed, as Alastair Johnston notes, the Serbian strategic culture was consciously manipulated “to justify the competence of decision-makers, deflect criticism, suppress dissent, and limit access to the decision process.”¹⁶

The transformation from multi-cultural Yugoslavia to exclusivist “Greater Serbia” was both significant and destructive as an entirely new (yet mythologically ancient) system of cultural “symbols” was promulgated and absorbed. War, as a state of human affairs was depicted as inevitable; with a readily identifiable enemy (all non-Serbs); and an imminent threat posed by an insidious and almost inhuman adversary (Muslims and Catholics). Furthermore, the struggle was presented as a “zero-sum” situation; victory or death of the Serbian nation. Facing this new “clear and present danger” of cultural extermination, the regime portrayed the sole defense available to a besieged people as violent and unmerciful force; only through the annihilation of these inhuman aggressors would Serbia survive. The Belgrade regime, by painting this grave threat to Serbians throughout Yugoslavia, thus deflected demands for radical political and economic change and ensured its own survival within this atmosphere of Balkan anarchy.

But what of the deeper motives? The regime’s declaratory strategy, cultural prosperity within a new nationalistic “Greater Serbia”, became the cloak for a much more sinister and politically pragmatic operational strategy of political dominance; featuring the ruthless extermination of potential political rivals. Through the use of symbols and an “official language” of political discourse which excluded alternative strategies, the Serbian regime undermined challenges to its authority, mobilized support and otherwise upheld

¹⁶Johnston, p.38.

hegemony in the decision process... they were recognized as (the only) competent and legitimate authorities within a framework of apocalyptic collapse.¹⁷

The deployment of an offensive "strategic culture" instrumentally served the regime in its quest for political hegemony, essentially legitimizing the authority and justifying the violent actions of those in power. Yet, this cultural juggernaut, once unleashed, began to prove incompatible with the political "game" rationality of the entrenched elite, and assumed a life of its own. Indeed, once the Serbian regime had expediently tapped the wellspring of mythological and historical tradition, the flow became unresponsive and even uncontrollable. The need for flexibility and adaptation within the evolving political arena of the former Yugoslavia was constrained by a monolithic and very dangerous hyper-nationalist society, populated with culturally re-coded Serbian Frankensteins (the Bosnian Serbs), and bound together by destructive myth.

The question has recently arisen as to whether the Serbian political elite can escape or control the newly re-awakened symbolic discourse --the cultural bulwarks which they themselves erected and nurtured. Perhaps a dialectic evolution of strategic culture does occur, but in this case, as we shall see, the violence and destruction, once unleashed, proved almost unstoppable even for the masters.

¹⁷Paraphrased and adapted to the "Serbian Case" from Johnston, p. 57, who cited Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, pp. 41-65, Polity, Cambridge, UK, 1991.

V. BALKAN MYTHS

The Balkan arena indeed has a rich and culturally complex past.¹⁸ Yet, despite these deep historical and cultural roots --this “thousand year old history”-- modern political struggle and survival is at the heart of the current conflict. As Ivo Banac points out:

“The current conflict among the South Slavs, specifically between the Serbs and the Croats, is not ancient, unless the term ancient encompasses the end of the nineteenth century, and it is not religious, although religion has played a part in the encounter. The current conflict is primarily ideological and political.”¹⁹

V.P. Gagnon further states that:

“A common explanation for violent conflict along ethnic lines, particularly for the Yugoslav case, is that ancient ethnic hatreds have burst to the surface. But this is unsupported by the evidence: in fact, Yugoslavia never saw the kind of religious wars seen in Western and Central Europe, and Serbs and Croats never fought before this century; intermarriage rates were quite high in those ethnically-mixed regions that saw the worst violence; and sociological polling as late as 1989-90 showed high levels of tolerance, especially in these mixed regions. Although some tensions existed between nationalities and republics, and the forcible repression of overt national sentiment added to the perception on all sides that the existing economic and political system was unjust, the evidence indicates that, notwithstanding claims to the contrary by nationalist politicians and historians in Serbia and Croatia, ‘ethnic hatreds’ are not the essential, primary cause of the Yugoslav conflict.”²⁰

In June of 1991, as the international community watched aghast on CNN, the Serbian regime in Belgrade began to execute a coldly premeditated, systematic, and violent campaign

¹⁸Two recent outstanding histories Yugoslavia are: Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina - A Tradition Betrayed*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994; and Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia - A Short History*, New York University Press, 1994.

¹⁹Ivo Banac, “The Fearful Asymmetry of War: The Causes and Consequences of Yugoslavia’s Demise”, *Daedalus*, p. 141, Spring 1992.

²⁰V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia”, *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 134, Winter 1994/95.

of terror. Fueled by vehement nationalism, the Serbian President --firmly in control of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA)-- initiated a ruthless program of "ethnic cleansing" throughout Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina with the intent of establishing himself as the leader of a culturally and politically homogenous "Greater Serbia".

Although the Croatian and Bosnian government forces have carried out ruthless campaigns against the Serbian diaspora throughout the former Yugoslavia, these policies must be seen in the context of the Serbian strategy; essentially backlash responses to the ruthless and violent spread of ethnic nationalism from Belgrade. An understanding the Serbian "Grand Strategy", which was launched as early as 1987, is the key to unlocking the contemporary Balkan puzzle.

By 1993, the State Department's annual report to the Congress on human rights stressed that:

"The atrocities of the Croats and Bosnian Muslims pale in comparison to the sheer scale and calculated cruelty of the killings and other abuses committed by Serbian and Bosnian Serbian forces against Bosnian Muslims. The policy of driving out innocent civilians of a different ethnic or religious group from their homes, so-called "ethnic cleansing", was practiced by Serbian forces in Bosnia on a scale that dwarfs anything seen in Europe since Nazi times."²¹

²¹ Albert Wohlstetter, "Bosnia as Future". Incorporated as chapter 5 of: *RAND Conference Proceedings; Lessons from Bosnia*, CF-113-AF, p. 28, RAND, Santa Monica, 1993.

VI. CATALYST FOR CRISIS

At the heart of this ideological, cultural and political turmoil stands Serbian President Slobodan Milošević. As chief functionary of the declining Yugoslav Communist regime, Milošević essentially hijacked and became the voice of Serbian hyper-nationalism; adopting a “grand strategy” which included the cultural re-coding and manipulation of his society in order to emphasize ethno-nationalism as the only politically relevant identity; depicting potential political rivals (all “non-Serbs”; but especially the Bosnian Muslims) as dangerous threats to the very existence of all Serbs and Serbia.

Slobodan Milošević represents a powerful synthesis or, more precisely “symbiosis”²², of Yugoslav Communism (political conservatism, support for centralism, and resistance to meaningful change); Serbian nationalism (desire for a sovereign “Greater Serbia”); Serbian Christian Orthodoxy; and the powerful Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA/JNA) -and his personal management of this symbiosis continues to profoundly affect developments within the former Yugoslavia.

Warren Zimmerman describes Milošević as “the slickest con man in the Balkans”.²³ Others have commented that he is a “consummate tactician, political chameleon, master of the bob and weave and, for all that, the key player on the Balkan scene...”²⁴ This author might add: ruthless opportunist and violent destabilizer of the Yugoslav Federation, whose cry of “strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia” has ripped the region into a patchwork of shell-shocked Southern Slavs.

Milošević, the great promoter of Serbian nationalism, began in 1987 to deliberately fan the psychological flames of the Serbian masses for personal aggrandizement. By

²²As described by Professor Norman Cigar, in his excellent book, *Genocide in Bosnia - The Policy of “Ethnic Cleansing,”* Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1995.

²³Warren Zimmerman, “The Last Ambassador,” *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 2-20, March/April 1995.

²⁴Karsten Prager, “Milošević Plays Peacekeeper,” *Time Magazine*, vol. 146, no. 3, 17 July 1993.

co-opting this powerful genie called nationalism (or loyalty to the nation) into the service of the state, and more precisely, into his personal vehicle for self-preservation and political power, he unleashed a formidable force which may not soon be stopped, especially among the Bosnian Serbs in the Sarajevo and Pale regions.

Christopher Bennett says of Milošević:

"Relatively little is known about the man himself... He was careful to keep as low a profile as possible... He only granted media interviews when absolutely necessary, and always stuck to a carefully rehearsed script. Serbian analysts who have followed Milošević's career closely (and written very little about it in English) insist he (is) not a nationalist, but that he (is) ruthlessly ambitious and prepared to use and abuse anybody and any ideology to fuel that ambition. His driving force was an overwhelming lust for power, not visions of a Greater Serbia, and for that reason he was far more dangerous."²⁵

If the root of all conflict is, as Thucydides claimed, either fear, interest or honor, Milošević has chosen fear:

Milošević seems to have allied himself permanently with the politics of fear. He thrives on it and is always on the lookout for the hostility and conflict that produce it. This is one of the deeper causes of the Yugoslav civil war: Milošević counted on war, the ultimate condition of fear, to unite Serbs around him. That is why he refused to look for political solutions to the persecution of Serbs in Croatia after Franjo Tuđman came to power in May 1990, and to the erosion of the Serbs' position in Bosnia Herzegovina, after the Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović became its president in November 1990. Milošević welcomed the Serbs' increased sense of insecurity and was only too glad to plunge them into a war in which they would have only him for protection."²⁶

²⁵Bennett, Christopher, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse - Causes, Course and Consequences*, p. 83, New York University Press, New York, 1995.

²⁶Aleksa Djilas, "A Profile of Slobodan Milošević," *Foreign Affairs*, p. 88, Summer 1993.

VII. A BRIEF HISTORY OF MILOŠEVIĆ

Slobodan Milošević was born on the 29th of August, 1941, in the Serbian town of Pozarevac --about 50 miles from Belgrade; population 20,000-- to an Orthodox Christian family of Montenegrin descent.²⁷ His father, Svetozar, studied Eastern Orthodox theology and taught Russian and Serbo-Croatian language and literature at a local high school. He left the family when "Slobo" was in elementary school, and committed suicide in 1962. His mother, Stanislava, was a schoolteacher, a dedicated communist activist and a strict, self-possessed woman who raised the children alone. She, too, committed suicide, in 1973. Milošević met his future wife Mirjana Markovic while attending high school in Pozarevac.

In 1964, Milošević graduated from the University of Belgrade Law School, where he had been active in party politics and might be best described as a prim loner --confident, assured, and highly creative. By 1968 he had gained an executive position with state-owned Technogas company, and became the close associate of Ivan Stambolic, whom he had met during his first year at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. Stambolic would remain Milošević's mentor, friend and associate until 1987, when, as chief political rivals, Milošević would ruthlessly force him from office and assume his position as Serbian President.

By 1969 Milošević had joined the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY); where he earned a reputation as a friendly, reliable and dynamic party apparatchik. By this time Yugoslavia had fully embraced Titoist Communism; very moderate compared to that in the Soviet and Eastern European countries, with a market-oriented economy, tolerant cultural policies and travel opportunities open to the West.

²⁷For profiles of Milošević see: Sabrina P. Ramet, "Serbia's Slobodan Milošević: A Profile," *Orbis*, p. 93, Winter 1991; and Ramet, "A New Napoleon: The Rise of Slobodan Milošević," in *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia 1962-1991*, p. 225, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1992; Aleksa Djilas, "A Profile of Slobodan Milošević," *Foreign Affairs*, p. 81, Summer 1993; Steven Burg, "Why Yugoslavia Fell Apart," *Current History*, p. 357, November 1993; V.P. Gagnon, Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict - The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, p.146, Winter 1994/95; and Warren Zimmerman, "Origins of a Catastrophe - Memoirs of the Last American Ambassador to Yugoslavia," *Foreign Affairs*, p. 2, March/April 1995.

However, in the early 1970's, in an attempt to preserve the status-quo, Marshal Josip Broz Tito began purges of all Serbian reform-minded communists. These "liberals" were in favor of liberal market forces, freedom of speech and European-style parliamentary democracy. They also believed that the party should withdraw from the realm of arts and culture, and should promote young and able people to leading positions. From this point, Tito began to increase political repression and strengthened the party's hold over the economy, which continued to deteriorate.

Membership in the party was limited to those who exhibited a dogmatic adherence to Marxism-Leninism --"Moral-political suitability"-- and this became the prerequisite for successful careers in business, the media, education and politics. Throughout this period, Milošević, the pragmatic opportunist, not only survived the purges, but in fact excelled as a doctrinaire communist.

By 1973 he had become director-general of Technogas, a state-owned enterprise, and began a long climb through the bureaucracy of Yugoslav politics. In 1978 he was appointed President of Beobanka (Belgrade Bank), a highly visible position, and often commuted between Belgrade and New York. Ambassador Zimmerman describes the influences of this experience:

"Milošević knows how to act with Americans. He dresses in the Western Style (he spent considerable time in New York in his banking days), drinks scotch on the rocks and smokes Italian cigarillos. His cherubic cheeks do not fit the strongman image... he has to work hard at looking tough for his public posters... his manner displays his light side... unfortunately, the man is almost totally dominated by his dark side".²⁸

Milošević was 38 years old when Tito died in 1980. After the death, he continued to consistently and convincingly defend Tito's legacy, remaining an uncompromising doctrinaire communist.

In April of 1984, his old friend and mentor Ivan Stambolic became chairman of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (LCS). Stambolic appointed Milošević, at age 43, as the head of the Belgrade party committee --to battle: the rising waves

²⁸Zimmermann, "The Last Ambassador," p. 4.

of “anti-Communist reactionaries”; bourgeois liberalism (the gravest threat to the communist power monopoly); and Great Serbian nationalism, a threat to both Serbian and non-Serbian communist regimes, especially the Albanians in Kosovo, the Slovenians and the Croatians. Even members within Serbian party advocated change --a particularly grave threat to both Stambolic and Milošević:

“In the early 1980's...Members of the Serbian party leadership called for totally removing party influence at the local levels of the economy; for greater reliance on private enterprise and individual initiative; multiple candidates in state and party elections; free, secret elections in the party; and recognition and adoption of ‘all the positive achievements of bourgeois civilization’, i.e. liberal democracy”.²⁹

Moreover, in 1985, a growing faction of Serbian nationalists began to express public outrage at the mass exodus of Serbians and Montenegrins from Kosovo --the result of rioting by the ethnic Albanians in that region. It was during this time that Milošević made his “entrance” as a credible politician, when he was invited to address the LCS's Central Committee. With his popular personality, emotional and semi-nationalistic tones, Milošević was received well by the committee. Coincidentally, in 1985, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) organized a commission of intellectuals to write a memorandum on the current Yugoslav situation.

In May of 1986, Stambolic became the President of the Republic of Serbia, and in his address to the 10th Congress of the Serbian Party, denounced the 1974 federal constitution as contrary to the interests of Serbs; and (interestingly) warned of the dangers of Serbian nationalism.

As Stambolic continued his political ascendency, Milošević followed by becoming chairman of the Central Committee of the LCS. Now chief of the Serbian Communist Party, Milošević appeared to be the embodiment of staunch communist party conservatism.

²⁹V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 145, Winter 1994/95.

But, facing significant economic deterioration, growing political opposition, and waning popular support, Milošević began to search for allies --and was drawn even closer to the ever-more- vocal Serbian nationalist movement.

A. THE DECISIVE MOMENT?

In April of 1987, Milošević attended a meeting of 300 party delegates of the LCY (mostly ethnic Albanians) in Kosovo Polje, a suburb of Kosovo's capital city of Pristina. The meeting had been open only to the Communist delegates, but some fifteen thousand Serbs and Montenegrins attempted to force their way into the meeting hall. Albanian police blocked the way and began to brutally disperse the crowd with clubs. Milošević, seizing the moment, raised his hands, stopped the chaos, and allowed the Serbians to enter the hall --where he told the crowd; "Nobody, either now or later, has the right to beat you."³⁰ This incident and these words have earned Milošević a place in Serbian mythology, and represent one of the decisive "sparks" which would ignite the Yugoslav conflagration. It was on this day that Milošević publicly abandoned doctrinaire communism, threw his saddle on Serbian nationalism and began the long, violent ride toward "Greater Serbia".

"After that night, suddenly there was a psychological change in him. All at once, he discovered he had this power over people."³¹ Moved by the plight of the Kosovo Serbs, the ex-communist bureaucrat had discovered the strength to step out in front and lead the Serbian masses. By adopting his own brand of Serbian nationalism, Milošević --ever the political opportunist-- transitioned from dogmatic communist to overt ideological eclectic. By the end of April, 1987, Slobodan Milošević had fully donned the cape of all-powerful nationalist leader and the new political arena was charged with Milošević's brand of authoritarian and exclusive Serbian nationalism.

³⁰*The Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1988.

³¹*The Washington Post*, February 4, 1990.

Although Milošević displayed a genuine and deep sympathy for the plight of Serbs in Kosovo and later throughout the Balkans, Ambassador Zimmerman has reservations about the moral qualities of President Milošević:

"He is a man of extraordinary coldness. I never saw him moved by an individual case of human suffering; for him, people are groups (Serbs, Muslims) or simply abstractions. Nor did I ever hear him say a charitable or generous word about any human being, not even a Serb. This chilling personality trait made it possible for Milošević to condone, encourage, and even organize the unspeakable atrocities committed by Serbian citizens in the Bosnian war. It also accounts for his habitual mendacity, as in his outrageous distortion of Serbian behavior in Kosovo. For Milošević, truth has only a relative value. If it serves his objectives, it is employed; if not, it can be discarded."³²

After the events of April 1987, Milošević began a ruthless campaign to achieve personal leadership of all Yugoslavia, and the manipulation of cultural symbols to incite Serbian passions immediately became one of his principal political strategies. Journalists who were sympathetic to (or indeed controlled by) Milošević, especially at the daily newspaper *Politika*, began what was to become an intense and ongoing media campaign to demonize ethnic Albanians (and later *all* non-Serbs) and to 'confirm' the allegations of widespread genocide against the Serbs.³³ As Roger Cohen describes it:

"Having sensed his opportunity, Mr. Milošević moved fast. Medieval battles, the relics of Serbian kings, the sacrifices of Serbian soldiers in two world wars, the alleged injustices endured by Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia, all suddenly became grist for the nationalist mill. The motto of his Communist-turned Socialist party was, 'Serbia does not kneel'."³⁴

By September of 1987, he had arranged for the chief of the Belgrade Party organization, Dragisa Pavlovic, to be dismissed; and in December, under direct attacks by

³²Zimmermann, "The Last Ambassador," p. 5.

³³V.P. Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 147, Winter 1994/95.

³⁴Roger Cohen, "Peace in the Balkans Now Relies on the Man Who Fanned Its Wars," *New York Times*, p.A6, 31 October, 1995.

the now Milošević-controlled media, Ivan Stambolic, Milošević’s longtime friend (and a defender of Pavlovic), was conveniently removed as Serbian President.

In May of 1989, two years after his Kosovo metamorphosis, the parliament of Serbia elected Milošević “President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia”.

VIII. MILOŠEVIĆ; SERBIAN PRESIDENT

Since 1987, Milošević's goals have focused primarily on gaining full control of the Serbian state (Serbia proper), and creating a unified country under Serbian domination (Greater Serbia). With a semi-free market and a semi-democratic (ex-communist) government under his personal tutelage, the initial drive consisted of reestablishing Serbian control over the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo.

A. DISSOLUTION OF THE 1974 CONSTITUTION

As early as May of 1986, President Stambolic had denounced the 1974 Federal Constitution as contrary to the interests of Serbs, and, after 1987, Milošević wasted no time in circumventing this document. Playing to Serbian pride, he began to criticize the policies of former president Tito, and especially his 1974 Constitution, for critically weakening Serbia. As the last Yugoslav Constitution to be promulgated, it had effectively given the 5 Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia complete sovereignty over their territories, including the right to secession.

Within the Republic of Serbia, the 2 Provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina had their own representatives in the federal, state and party bodies; and these delegates had historically tended to vote mostly against Serbia, and, more significantly, against the Milošević regime. The Serbs, after 1974, had always believed that they had been singled out for unfair treatment by Tito; and in fact the Constitution had largely separated Kosovo and Vojvodina from Serbia.

Serbia's autonomous province of Kosovo is claimed by the Serbs to be "the real jewel in the Serbian crown", the heartland of the medieval Serbian kingdom and the site of the (mythologically) important 1389 Battle of Kosovo. Since the late 1960's Serbs have been emigrating from this predominantly Albanian province (Serbs historically made up only 10 percent of the population), and by the mid-1980's, between 200,000 and 300,000 Serbs had been forced out, mostly by Albanian extremists --providing an inter-ethnic tinderbox of tension and strained relations, and fuel for Serbian nationalist agitation from Belgrade.

In 1987, Milošević began to call publicly via mass rallies, speeches and interviews for not only the protection of all Serbs in Kosovo, but the physical suppression of the separatist Albanians. In 1988, a Committee for the Protection of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins was established. As Committee Chairman Miroslav Ransovic put it; “If we don’t get our rights, we will take up arms”³⁵

And “take up arms” they did. The Kosovo Albanian separatist movement was brutally suppressed, and behind the rallying cry of “Strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia”, the Serbian regime in Belgrade aimed their nationalist flame-thrower on the Serbian Republic of Vojvodina.

Sabrina P. Ramet sums it up nicely:

On 6 October (1988), Milošević mobilized some one hundred thousand supporters on the streets of Novi Sad, and the entire leadership of Vojvodina resigned, including provincial party leader Milovan Sogorov and provincial president Nandor Major. Further resignations were tendered in the cities and local communities of Vojvodina... In their places, Milošević installed his own people...”³⁶

By February of 1989, Milošević had succeeded in eliminating the constitutional provisions guaranteeing autonomy to Kosovo and Vojvodina and reincorporated them into Serbia. In 1990, the Federal Yugoslav Army, on Milošević’s orders, occupied Kosovo, establishing a precedent which would be repeated again on June 27, 1991, when Yugoslav Army tanks invaded independent Slovenia --effectively demolishing the modern country of Yugoslavia.

B. CULT OF PERSONALITY

The personal popularity of President Milošević blossomed quickly throughout Serbia after 1987. Through his newly found populist-charismatic style, his direct appeal to the masses, careful manipulation of crowds and tight control of the media, Milošević began to

³⁵*Profil*, October 24, 1988.

³⁶Sabrina P. Ramet, “Serbia’s Slobodan Milošević: A profile,” *Orbis*, vol. 35, no. 1, p 98, Winter 1991.

cultivate his image as a virtual nationalist icon with promises to return Serbia to its rightful place in the sun.

Playing to the Serbian sense of “machismo” and respect for physical strength, “Comrade Slobo” began to boast of his “strong arm rule” (*cvrsta ruka*) with which he would “protect” ethnic Serbs in not only in the autonomous province of Kosovo, but in Croatia and Bosnia as well.³⁷ Shops and restaurants began to display his picture in the front windows, and his icon suddenly appeared in Serbian Orthodox Churches throughout the country. Budimir Kostic, president of the Serbian Investment Bank, enthusiastically explains that, “Milošević had (in mid-1989) full support in Serbia, from the peasants to the Academy of Science. He’d get 90 per cent of the vote in any election!”³⁸ Alexander Zivic, a journalist at Belgrade radio, reported in 1988 that Milošević was a Serbian hero: “The crowds shout ‘Slobodan, we love you!’ --They see him as a savior!”³⁹

C. CONTROL OF THE PRESS

The primary means by which Milošević has successfully achieved his goal has been through a carefully orchestrated and highly sophisticated Serbian media propaganda campaign --newspapers, radio, and most importantly, Serbian TV. The following passage offers a glimpse of the extensive Serbian press manipulations and disinformation strategies aimed at the population.

“By far, TV has been the most essential medium in the Greater Serbia push. ‘The war would be impossible without TV,’ says Vesna Pesic, leader of a Belgrade opposition party. Serbia is 35 percent illiterate, and TV is gospel in the countryside, but even many educated Serbs are devotees. A young medical student complains that his mother, a biochemist, has been following the TV news each night with a map, ‘marking where the Serbs have gained

³⁷*The New York Times*, October 14, 1988.

³⁸*The New York Times*, August 6, 1989.

³⁹William Echikson, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 13 October, 1988.

territory and screaming whenever Serbs are shot at. My dad and I can't believe it. *Its like they stole my mother.*"⁴⁰

Sabrina Ramet describes how Milošević, from the very earliest stages of his program, was able to seize control of 95 percent of the Serbian press:

"To establish power in Serbia, Milošević thought he needed a pliant press. He therefore fired a number of editors and journalists at the prestigious Politika publishing house, and the daily papers *Politika* and *Politika ekspres* as well as the weekly magazines *Duga* and *NIN* became mere mouthpieces for Milošević's policies... Publications appeared which were the direct result of Milošević's nationalist policies... in 1987 a book was published which attempted to link the Vatican with the misdeeds of the fascist Ustase of World War II --clearly an attempt to undermine the Catholic Church, the cultural champion of the Serbs' arch-rivals, the Croats."⁴¹

Furthermore, although a small team of international journalists (Gutman, Reiff, Cohen, et al.) were able to provide ongoing coverage of the Balkan implosion to viewers in the West, the people within Serbia were essentially cut off from all timely and accurate news sources (CNN, BBC, etc.) The Wall Street Journal describes Milošević's tight control of the Serbian media:

"Incredible as it might seem to us (the West) who are bombarded daily with horrific images of the savagery in Bosnia, few Serbs are aware of what is going on there. Milošević's control of the local media, plus the West's economic embargo, mean that accurate information doesn't reach Belgrade"⁴²

Through his virtual monopoly and careful manipulation of all news sources, Milošević was able to consistently broadcast a steady stream of unnerving propaganda to the more than 500,000 satellite dishes throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Mihajlo Mihajlov reported from Belgrade that,

"If one did not read the newspapers or watch the news on television, one would have the impression that there is little likelihood of a civil war

⁴⁰Robert Marquand, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 26 January, 1993 (Emphasis added).

⁴¹Ramet, "Serbia's Slobodan Milošević: A Profile", p. 97.

⁴²"Beyond Bosnia," *Wall Street Journal*, p. A10, 6 May 1993.

breaking out... If you read the Yugoslav newspapers, you get the impression that a civil war has already started.”⁴³

In the words of Milos Vasic, an editor of the independent Belgrade newspaper *Vreme*, the conflict has been “an artificial war, really, produced by television. All it took was a few years of fierce, reckless, chauvinist, intolerant, expansionist, warmongering propaganda to create enough hate to start the fighting... Imagine a United States with every little TV station everywhere taking the same editorial line --a line dictated by David Duke. You, too, would have war in five years.”⁴⁴

In a section of their book, War and Anti-War, Alvin and Heidi Toffler describe some of the classic propaganda tools which have been used effectively throughout time to galvanize various populations. As the Tofflers explain, “Each of these ‘mind-wrenches’ is designed to exploit the mass media to sway mass emotion in mass societies.”⁴⁵ These “Six Wrenches That Twist The Mind” are particularly germane to the description of the Serbian Media.

1. The Atrocity Accusation

Atrocity stories have been a staple of the Serbian war propaganda, and whether true or false, have indeed served the Belgrade media and inflamed popular emotion. In 1992, for example, after years of reporting “genocide” against Serbs in Kosovo, the Belgrade media began to portray the peoples within Bosnia- Herzegovina as, “the ethnic enemy... the fundamentalist-Muslim population of Bosnia, who were... seeking to impose an Islamic state and to perpetrate genocide against the Bosnian Serbs”.⁴⁶

⁴³Mihajlo Mihajlov, “Back in Yugoslavia,” *The New Leader*, pp. 7-8, 14 January, 1991.

⁴⁴Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*, p. 236, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1993.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁶V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 163, Winter 1994/95.

Biljana Bakic explains how the Belgrade media machine dredged up memories of past atrocities, and used them to further stoke the conflagration,

"Images were stressed which evoked the specter of the wartime Croatian fascists, including prime-time television broadcasts of previously un-shown graphic films from the Ustase concentration camps. The implication --and at times explicit conclusions-- of these and other such images was that Croats as a people were 'genocidal'.⁴⁷

2. Hyperbolic Inflation of the Stakes Involved

Citizens were bombarded daily --through the newspapers and Television-- with urgent reports that everything which they held dear was in grave danger; the very survival of the Serbian people, their culture, their lands, their children --certain disaster lurked ominously just over the horizon. Christopher Bennett explains that, "The propaganda offensive was so intense that ordinary Serbs rapidly came to believe that they were permanently under siege and surrounded by blood enemies whose only desire was to wipe them out."⁴⁸

3. Demonization And/or Dehumanization of the Opponent

Professor Cigar offers that, "One element (in dehumanization) is the denigration of out-groups either as subhuman or by metaphors of disease. There is a consensus that this (type of defamation) provides moral license for general destruction."⁴⁹

In Serbia, for example, not only was the nation in grave danger, but its "blood enemies" were consistently depicted as inhuman monsters; a terrible Islamic fundamentalist disease which had to be ruthlessly eradicated. In late 1991, an Orthodox cleric wrote of the "malignant disease" of the "Fascist- fundamentalist Muslim community" which must be either "cured or excised."

⁴⁷Biljana Bakic, "*The Role of the Media in the Yugoslav Wars*," draft Master's Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, Spring 1992.

⁴⁸Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse - Causes, Course and Consequences*, p. 10, New York University Press, New York, 1995.

⁴⁹Cigar, p. 31.

Gagnon explains that essentially all “non-Serbs” were targeted --and, to further shatter the cultural foundation, even Tito himself was called into question--

“The strategy of consolidating control over the other republics through the use of aggressive Serbian nationalism was accompanied by increasingly vehement media demonization not only of Albanians, but of Croats; as well as an active campaign to portray Tito’s Yugoslavia as specifically anti-Serbian”.⁵⁰

Furthermore, the Serbs were depicted as helpless victims of various insidious conspiracies. The following is typical of the Serbian sentiment after prolonged exposure to the media:

“Every night, on the Belgrade news reports, the insatiable hordes of the Muslim-Vatican conspiracy launch new attacks against Serbia. They commit new outrages. And still the world does nothing --absolutely nothing!-- to help the heroic Serb people in their heroic struggle against aggression.”⁵¹

4. Polarization

As we will see later, the Serbian brand of nationalism emphasized an exclusivist “us” versus the rest philosophy --”those who are not Serbian are against us.” This deliberate polarization pitted all Serbs throughout the former Yugoslavia against all “non-Serbs”, producing a siege mentality with even civilized and educated people believing the propaganda.

5. Divine Sanction

From the very early stages, Milošević was able to fully co-opt and effectively place the Serbian Orthodox Church into the service of the Belgrade propaganda machine. (See section on the Serbian Orthodox Church).

6. Propaganda Discrediting the Opponent’s Propaganda

The Tofflers offer a cogent description of this “wrench”, explaining that “Meta-propaganda is particularly potent because, instead of challenging the veracity of a single

⁵⁰V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia,” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 151, Winter 1994/95.

⁵¹T.D. Allman, “Serbia’s Blood War”, in Ali and Lifscultz, *Why Bosnia?*, p. 41.

story, it calls into question everything coming from the enemy. Its aim is to produce wholesale, as distinct from retail, disbelief".⁵²

In fact, the pro-regime Belgrade media consistently went to great lengths to discredit all contradictory information. The Economist offers an excellent example of both the Serbs' total reliance on TV for their daily news, and the extent to which the media was carefully controlled:

"The Socialists control the state television network. For the vast majority of Serbs, it is their only source of information. It reports lovingly on Mr. Milošević's daily doings, accusing the independent press of being in the pay of anti-Serb forces abroad."⁵³

In July of 1995, President Milošević spoke with several Western editors and bureau chiefs in Belgrade. When asked about the use of rape in the Bosnian Serb detention camps --which is now well documented-- Milošević replied:

"When we first heard via the foreign press that there were some detention camps and rapes, our first reaction was, 'What about that?' The (Bosnian Serb) leadership explained, 'It is absolutely not the truth, absolutely not.' That was what was explained to us, and we then had a very deep confidence in what they were explaining. And I believed that just because of habit. One detail reported in the press: a Muslim girl who was pregnant by rape got shelter in a hospital in Switzerland. An abortion was not possible, and when the child was born, it happened to be Negro. No Serb was a Negro. Not one".⁵⁴

D. THE INTELLIGENTSIA (LEGITIMATION)

In concert with the media, the Serbian intelligentsia has played a leading part in the intellectual and cultural "re-nationalization" of Serbia. As V.P. Gagnon says, "the peoples of Yugoslavia had managed to live without overt violence for a generation, and convincing

⁵²Toffler, p. 168.

⁵³"Milošević's Weimar Republic," *The Economist*, vol. 329, no. 7841, p. 59, 11 Dec. 1993.

⁵⁴Karsten Prager, "I Am Just An Ordinary Man," *Time*, vol. 146, no. 3, July 17, 1995.

present-day Serbs of the desirability of a Greater Serbia required a systematic and intensive political and media campaign".⁵⁵

From the earliest stages of his drive, Milošević controlled and manipulated the Serbian intellectual community, specifically the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). Considered by many to be the “spiritual standard-bearers” for Serbian nationalism, members of SANU have untiringly published a number of inflammatory documents and memorandums, and bear primary responsibility for the cynical and nihilistic brand of Serbian nationalism generating mass self-pity, anger and hatred.

In May of 1985 the Serbian intelligentsia organized a commission to write a memorandum on the current Yugoslav situation. The *Serbian Memorandum*, as it eventually came to be known, was initially made public on 24 September, 1986, and provided Milošević with the strategic blueprint for the establishment of his “Greater Serbia”.

“An ideological manifesto written by some members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1985, although claiming to call for democracy, actually advocated the restoration of the repressive, centralized socialist system that existed before the 1965 reforms. It sharply attacked the 1965 reforms as the root of all evil in Yugoslavia and as being aimed against Serbs; declared Serbs in Kosovo and Croatia to be endangered; and denounced the ‘anti-Serb coalition’ within Yugoslavia.”⁵⁶

The heart of this Manifesto claims that the “National Question” of the Serbian people had been thwarted at the end of World War II, since the Serbs “did not get their own state like other peoples”. The only possible solution, it claims, is to bring about the territorial unity of the Serbian people, to be achieved by ensuring that all the Serbs live in a single

⁵⁵Gagnon, V.P. Jr., “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia” *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 130-166, Winter 1994/95.

⁵⁶Gagnon, p. 148.

Serbian national state; Greater Serbia.⁵⁷ The Memorandum further states that Tito pursued consistent discrimination against the Serbs and Serbian “Nation”.⁵⁸

In 1989, Milošević stated that “As for the Serbian Academy of (Arts and) Sciences, I do not see at all why it should not have influence over policy in Serbia”⁵⁹ ...and in fact, many of the Serbian Intellectuals who drafted the Serbian Memorandum have become key political figures under Milošević.

⁵⁷The text of the *Serbian Memorandum* has not been translated into English. It was first published by the Belgrade Press and in Bozo Covic, ed., *Izvori Velikosrpske agresije (The Sources of Greater Serbian Aggression)*, Zagreb, Skolska Knjiga, 1991. Cigar recommends p. 297 (and *passim*) for essential elements of the Memorandum.

⁵⁸“Memorandum SANU,” *Duga*, p. 31, Belgrade, June 1989. Partial Text: The economic reform of 1965 was in essence a change in the basic strategic direction of social development: the project of political democratization was substituted for a project of economic liberalization. The idea of self-management, whose essence is the dis-alienation of politics, was substituted for the idea of decentralization, which brought about the establishment of regional centers of alienated power. The ethics of solidarity and social justice were substituted for the spirit of possessive individualism and apology of group interest. Political voluntarism, which was daring and dynamic in the first postwar decades, when it could count on the mass support of the people, now became static and determined in the defense of the system, even when it became evident that the system is inconsistent and ineffective.

⁵⁹Cited from an interview with Milošević, “It Is Necessary To Find A Common Language in the Preservation of Yugoslavia,” *Politika*, p. 7, 22 Dec. 1989.

IX. RED, BROWN, BLACK, GRAY SYMBIOSIS

Under the guidance of Milošević, and driven by the media and the intelligentsia, Serbia's old Communist regime (Red) forged a tenuous coalition with the non-communist nationalists (Brown), the Serbian Orthodox Church (Black), and the Gray-uniformed and Serbian dominated Yugoslav Peoples Army (YPA). This symbiosis supplied Milošević with the initial momentum and organization with which to consolidate his political power and begin the violent march toward "Greater Serbia".

A. SERBIAN NATIONALISM (BROWN)

Nationalism has no rival either in mobilizing the masses against a common threatening enemy or in its capacity to inspire self-sacrifice in defense of the home nation, and Milošević clearly recognized this potential source of power and embraced it. The initial and most significant of his political concessions might be described as the "Red/Brown" symbiosis --or the Communist/Nationalist merger.⁶⁰ By embracing and co-opting the powerful force of Serbian nationalism (loyalty to "Greater Serbia"), Milošević directed the cultural wellspring of Serbian society into the service of the state, and more precisely, into a personal force for self-preservation and power acquisition. He essentially fanned the psychological flames of the Serbian masses for personal aggrandizement.

Serbian Nationalism is best described as authoritarian, exclusive and historically nihilistic. The Serbs are convinced (or more precisely, have *been* convinced) that history has treated them unfairly, they have never been justly rewarded for their noble idealism, but rather have been consistently punished with humiliation and suffering --deprived of their legitimate rights.

Vehement Serbian nationalism is undoubtedly Milošević's source of strength and power. The following is an excerpt from a speech delivered in Belgrade on 19 November, 1988:

⁶⁰Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia*, p. 32.

"...This is no time for sorrow; it is a time for struggle. (indistinct shouting) This awareness captured Serbia last summer and this awareness has turned into a material force that will stop the terror in Kosovo and unite Serbia. (indistinct shouting) This is a process which no longer can be stopped by any force, a process in the face of which all fear is weak. People will even consent to live in poverty but they will not consent to live without freedom, at least not the people gathered here and the people in Serbia, to whom I myself belong and therefore I know that they can only live in freedom and in no other way. (indistinct shouting) Both the Turkish and the German invaders know that these people win their battles for freedom."⁶¹

This passage is eerily reminiscent of a passage from *Mien Kampf*, in which Hitler states "We as Aryans, are therefore able to imagine a State only to be the living organism of a nationality which not only safeguards the preservation of that nationality but which, by further training of its spiritual and ideal abilities, leads to its highest freedom".⁶²

Thus Milošević began to promulgate the irresistible notion that loyalty to the Serbian Nation, embodied in the ethnically pure "Greater Serbian" State, (not, by any means, the Yugoslav State), was the key to survival of his Serbs. "Only unity can save the Serbs!" --a motto emblazoned on the banners of Serbian nationalist banners-- began to regularly appear at scheduled and funded rallies throughout Serbia. Milošević clearly recognized that nationalism, as a mass emotion, was the most powerful political force operative in the Balkans. Furthermore, those Serbs who refused to accept Milošević's brand of Serbian nationalism were classified as enemies of the people, and became increasingly more vulnerable to persecution as traitors.

B. SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (BLACK)

Another carefully cultivated and essential element of the symbiosis has been the Serbian Orthodox church. Long mistreated and ignored --in fact often faced with savage political assaults during the long period of post-WWII communist rule-- the church suddenly

⁶¹Belgrade Domestic Service, November 19, 1988; in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Eastern Europe* (hereafter, FBIS; *Eastern Europe*), November 21, 1988.

⁶²Adolph Hitler, *Mien Kampf*, p. 595, New York, 1940.

found itself glorified in Milošević's Serbian press. Priests began to participate in nationalist demonstrations, espousing the alleged evils of Catholicism and Mohammedanism, which, understandably, served to further increase the cultural distance between Serbia and the other Balkan communities; specifically the predominately Catholic regions within Croatia and the Bosnian Muslims. V.P. Gagnon explains that:

“The relation to religious identity is a complex issue, and is related to the fact that in traditional Serbian national mythology, born in the fight against the Ottomans, the Muslim Turks are seen as the ultimate enemy. Although religion *per se* was minimally relevant to interpersonal relations in Yugoslavia before the most recent wars, as part of the Serbian national mythology it was drawn upon in a selective way to the political ends of demonizing Albanians and Slavic Muslims.”⁶³

Symbolic of the extent of the Red-Black political collaboration, the Serbian Orthodox Church played a key role as the Milošević government marked the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo, on 28 June of 1989; a “made-for-the-media” exploitation of Serbian cultural symbols.

“Where the pre-Milošević Serbian press had excoriated the Serbian Church for meddling in nationalism, under Milošević, *Politika* (a Belgrade newspaper) praised the Serbian Orthodox Church for its service to the Serbian people, and even declared that Orthodoxy was the spiritual basis for and the most essential component of the national identity (of Serbs).”⁶⁴ By embracing the Orthodox Church, the primordial wellspring of Serbian culture, Milošević added strength and legitimacy to his movement.

As reward for its loyal “service”, the Serbian Orthodox Church has benefited in several important areas since 1987; including extensive church rebuilding programs and religious instruction (replacing Marxist indoctrination) in the Serbian public schools. In January of 1990, Orthodox Christmas was publicly celebrated in downtown Belgrade for the

⁶³V.P. Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia”, *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 141 (note 24), Winter 1994/95.

⁶⁴Cited from the Serbian newspaper *Politika*, p. 18, 2 September 1990, in Sabrina Ramet’s *Balkan Babel*, p. 161, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992.

first time in 40 years, and pictures of Milošević have been seen among the religious icons during Orthodox services.⁶⁵

However, in addition to merely blessing the new nationalist fervor, the Church has also played a more sinister role in the Milošević grand strategy. For instance, the Serbian warlord Zeljko Raznatovic (*nom de guerre*: Arkan), who has personally led and participated in the most heinous of Serbian atrocities, received his initial assistance “above all” from the Serbian Orthodox Church in organizing, financing, and arming his irregular militia.⁶⁶

The Orthodox Church media has also been responsible for much of the anti-Islamic fervor which began to grip Serbia in the late 1980's. Emphasizing the alleged Muslim threat, an Orthodox priest from Bosnia-Herzegovina claimed that “for the last few decades we (Serbs) have also become known for being the target of sudden pressure of Jihad from fundamentalist Islam.”⁶⁷ An article in *Pravoslavlje*, an official church publication, stressed that the Serbs were engaged in a struggle between the Serbian defenders of peace and the evil forces of oppression.⁶⁸ War was essentially depicted by the Church as a religious experience for the Serbs.

Radovan Karadžić, the Montenegrin-born psychiatrist, leader of the Bosnian Serbs and President of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, has claimed that the Muslim state in Bosnia-Herzegovina must “be controlled”, and that the Serbs (as the most powerful nation in the Balkans) are in fact “doing that for all of Europe... to make sure Islamic fundamentalism doesn't infect Europe from the south”.⁶⁹

⁶⁵Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, p. 161.

⁶⁶Interview with Arkan by Toma Dzadzic, “Vec imam kucu na Dedinju” (I Already Have a House on Dedinje), *NIN*, p. 11, December 13, 1991. Cited in Cigar, *Genocide*, p.36.

⁶⁷Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia*, p. 31.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹John Pomfret, “Pact May Restore Utilities in Sarajevo,” *Washington Post*, p. A8, July 13, 1993.

In 1992, portraying the conflict as an assault against Christianity, Serbian Orthodox Bishop Antanasije warned that “militant Islam has used the conflict to establish a foothold in the Balkans... the West is not aware of the penetration of Islam... where mosques are rising where there were none before.”⁷⁰

As late as January of 1993, the Serbian Ministry of Information continued to publish inflammatory anti-Muslim propaganda. The following was written for the Ministry by a Serbian Orthodox Priest:

“They (the Muslims) want, for the second time, to create a Turkish Bosnia or a Bosnia in Turkey... with the Shariatic law and other life norms unacceptable in the twenty-first century. Behind all this is a century-old (sic) dream of a primitive man to live off the backs of the subjugated people, to have his own harem, dreaming of Istanbul, where, according to him, there is a paradise on earth, where “fairies are bathing in sherbet”. They (the Muslims) invited to this bloody feast all other worldly bums, murderers and dogs of war. Mujahedins (sic) and Jihad fanatics from the Islamic countries (came) to fulfill their “sacred duty” and to exterminate us. This unscrupulousness completely fits their religion and tradition and culture.”⁷¹

C. THE YUGOSLAV PEOPLE’S ARMY (GRAY)

Formerly the protector of Yugoslavia as a whole --not particular nationalist groups-- the pre-Milošević Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA/JNA) was considered dogmatic, conservative and fiercely anti-democratic. At the beginning of the conflict (June 1991) the Officer Corps was 65 percent Serbian, and this percentage increased when Croatian and Slovene officers left, as the secession movements (Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) gained momentum. V.P. Gagnon explains that in 1989 the Yugoslav Peoples Army...

“... openly sided with (Milošević’s) conservative positions and harshly attacked the political opposition. In the military itself, conservative

⁷⁰Andrew Borowiec, “Serbian Bishop Warns of Muslims’ Gains in the Balkans,” *Washington Times*, p. A9, September 30, 1992.

⁷¹Fr. Savo Knezevic, “Extermination of Serbs--In Pictures and Words”, *Serbia: Documents, Comments, Interviews*, p. 17, Republic of Serbia Ministry of Information, Belgrade, January 15, 1993.

Marxist-Leninist indoctrination was stepped up. The army also endorsed Milošević's neo-socialist economic and political program, stressing in particular continued monopoly of the communist party and recentralization of the state. In cooperation with Serbian conservatives, the military openly attacked reformists' calls to democratize the country, to reduce the military's political role and to reform the military-industrial complex. Statements by top army officers made it clear that they viewed the Army's internal mission in orthodox ideological terms.”⁷²

However, through favorable press coverage, political nurturing and fiscal inducement, and with an overwhelming number of Serbian officers, the army eventually became the fighting arm of Serbian nationalism; and, at the outbreak of hostilities with Croatia in 1991, it was under the direct personal control of Milošević.

Senior presidential aide, Borislav Jovic, said that in April of 1991, more than 2 months before war broke out in Croatia:

“We decided to change tactics. We would deploy troops in Serb areas of Croatia, the Croats would provoke war, and we would then take those territories (Krajina)... We knew that when Bosnia was recognized, we'd be seen as aggressors because our army was there. So Milošević and I talked it over, and we realized we'd have to pull a fast one. We transferred all the Bosnian Serbs in our Yugoslav Army to their forces and promised to pay all their costs (which created an extremely well-armed Bosnian Serb force...)”⁷³

By 1992, at the outbreak of hostilities with Bosnia-Hercegovina, the army was firmly under the personal control of the Belgrade regime:

“The general staff in Belgrade is obedient to Milošević. Belgrade doesn't plan only the movement of Serbian forces... The war in BH (Bosnia-Hercegovina) was carefully planned by the top political and military leadership in Belgrade. In BH, Mladec has multi-channel communications to both his subordinate commanders and to the (Belgrade) general staff and Milošević.” And further, “Despite Milošević's assertion that there were only 2,000 or so paramilitaries--he calls them ‘bandits and killers’ --responsible for the war crimes, (a former diplomat concludes) that it was an elaborate and very systematic series of campaigns, employing a combination of military

⁷²Gagnon, “Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict - The Case of Serbia,” p. 152.

⁷³Roger Cohen, “Peace in the Balkans Now Relies on the Man Who Fanned Its Wars,” *New York Times*, p. A6, 31 October, 1995.

assets and local para-militaries. They didn't sweep through 70% of the country in three months using local maniacs.”⁷⁴

Throughout the conflict, the military strategy of the Serbs consisted of overrunning and “ethnically cleansing” weakly defended areas after a period of prolonged and merciless bombardment and siege from a distance; seeking minimum Serbian military and maximum Croatian and/or Bosnian civilian casualties. Yet, the Serbian army, while appearing to be formidable, has been plagued by low motivation, poor discipline and a lack of manpower. Additionally, the Serbian forces have been overextended and lack sufficient manpower to carry out concentrated campaigns on more than one front at a time. These thin forces were indeed vulnerable to commando attacks and guerrilla warfare behind their lines, and the Bosnian government were successful in this type of warfare.

⁷⁴Karsten Prager, “Milošević Plays Peacekeeper,” *Time Magazine*, vol. 146, no. 3, 17 July 1993.

X. HYPER-NATIONALISM UNLEASHED

A. IN THE WAKE OF MILOŠEVIĆ'S MARCH TO "GREATER SERBIA"

The international community has witnessed a ruthless and violent conflict within the former Yugoslavia during the past several years.⁷⁵ Several questions come to mind: How effectively has Milošević been able to move toward his "Greater Serbia"? What was his strategy for regaining (or acquiring) Serbian territory? And finally, was this action really "genocide", or a legitimate attempt to liberate the Serbian people throughout Yugoslavia?

B. ETHNIC CLEANSING?

The Serbian regime, after years of culturally re-coding their population and preparing for war, finally launched a violent and systematic campaign of annihilation in 1991. The stated goal was to "protect Serbs" from genocidal Catholics and Muslims throughout the former Yugoslavia, and re-gain traditional Serbian regions; the real operational strategy was to "cleanse" great tracts territory of all potential political rivals and populations, and forge a new "Greater Serbia" within the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia. All "non-Serbs" within critical border regions (Krajina, Slavonia, Eastern Bosnia) and corridors (Posavina) were to be permanently displaced; all men of fighting age (potential resistance) killed, women and children brutally terrorized into flight.

"Ethnic cleansing", as it came to be called, was not the result of tribal warfare, it was the means by which the Serbian regime sought to consolidate power both at home and within the newly acquired territories. Moreover, the killing was not wanton and random massacre --as was often depicted by the press-- but a closely controlled and coordinated exercise --and initially very successful.

⁷⁵Two particularly thorough publications describing the horrors of "ethnic cleansing" are: Gutman, Roy; *A Witness to Genocide*, Macmillan Publishing, New York, 1993, (1993 Pulitzer Prize Winner); and Reiff, David, *Slaughterhouse -Bosnia and the Failure of the West*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1995.

In March 1989, the CIA concluded an assessment of “atrocities” which had been committed in Bosnia. The report states that:

“90 percent of the acts of “ethnic cleansing” were carried out by Serbs (and) leading Serbian politicians almost certainly played a role in the crimes... in a systematic attempt to eliminate all traces of other ethnic groups from their territory... the systematic nature of the Serbian actions strongly suggest that Pale and perhaps Belgrade exercised a carefully veiled role in the purposeful destruction and dispersal of non-Serb populations... it makes clear with concrete evidence that there was a conscious, coherent and systematic Serbian policy to get rid of Muslims, through murders torture and imprisonment... premeditated attacks on Bosnia’s Muslim population... particularly intense in the towns of Prijedor, Banja Luka, Zvornik, Bijeljina, Vlasenica, Foca and Trebinje... with an intensity, sustained orchestration and scale... which pales to the alleged atrocities committed by the Croatian and Bosnian forces.”⁷⁶

Faced with the daunting task of moving hundreds of thousands of people from their traditional homelands, as quickly and efficiently as possible, the Serbian regime had unleashed both regular Army and (often psychopathic) “irregular” forces on the populations of Croatian Krajina and Bosnia-Herzegovina. James O. Jackson offers this account of Serbian brutality:

“The war has been as ugly as any in history. At least 85% of the 200,000 killed in three years of fighting have been civilians. An additional 4 million have become refugees, most of them driven from their homes in pogroms of “ethnic cleansing”. Survivors tell of concentration camps, brutal guards, starvation rations, killing grounds, mass graves. They remember a sadist called the Butcher, the killer gang known as the Jokers. They have witnessed summary executions, decapitations, human beings being thrown on bonfires. Some still hear the moans of raped women, the shrieks of terrified children, the howls of men under torture.”⁷⁷

Milošević’s carefully planned and orchestrated campaign to secure his own position as omnipotent Serbian master indeed proceeded almost unhindered for many months,

⁷⁶Roger Cohen, “CIA Report on Bosnia Blames Serbs for 90% of the War Crimes,” *New York Times*, p. 1, 9 march 1995.

⁷⁷James O. Jackson, “The Balkans --No Rush To Judgment,” *Time Magazine*, 27 June 1994.

eventually capturing almost 70% of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Professor Albert Wohlstetter, a vocal critic of western policy in the Balkans, describes the conflict in the following manner:

“Since June 1991, the United States has used its own diplomacy and the UN Security Council in a grim charade of “neutral mediation” between a Serbian genocidal aggressor and his victims... this enormous human catastrophe is not the unintended byproduct of war: It is ethnic cleansing, the deliberate slaughter of innocent civilians, the destruction of their private homes and public places of worship and assembly, and the systematic rape of women to inspire terror and flight for the strategic purpose of creating a Slobodan Milošević’s Greater Serbia.”⁷⁸

C. THE NUREMBERG TRIBUNAL CHARTER

The Nuremberg Tribunal Charter was drafted in 1945 with the establishment of the Nuremberg tribunal. Article 6 (c) and (d)⁷⁹ of that charter define War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity; there can be little doubt that there have been numerous incidents which fall within these definitions, but what about the charges of genocide?

According to Rafael Lemkin, whose influence led the term to be incorporated into the Geneva conventions,

“Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life

⁷⁸Wohlstetter, Albert, “Genocide by Embargo,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 May 1994.

⁷⁹**Nuremberg Tribunal Charter**, Office of the United States Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi conspiracy and Aggression: Opinion and Judgment*, pp. 3-4, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1947.

(c) War Crimes: Namely, violations of the laws and customs of war. Such violations shall include, but not be limited to, murder, ill-treatment, or deportation to slave labor or for any other purpose of civilian population of or in occupied territory, murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas, killing of hostages, plunder of public or private property, wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity.

(d) Crimes against Humanity: Namely murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war, or persecutions on political racial, or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country perpetrated.

of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity but as members of a national group.”⁸⁰

Based on Mr. Lemkin’s definition of “genocide”, and given the detailed and horrifying accounts of the systematic campaign of annihilation, there should be little doubt that the intent of the Serbian regime was essential “genocidal” from the very beginning. Ibrahim Kajan argues that although the violence in Yugoslavia does not technically fall within the letter of the United Nation’s definition of genocide⁸¹, the atrocities committed certainly should be considered as such:

“There are many shortcomings in the United Nations Convention on Genocide... for example... cultural genocide is not considered in the Convention... and all the great powers (have been) against condemning this form of genocide. In every crime the intent is primary. Horrific mass murders may still not be considered an act of genocide, if the principal motive is not the destruction of a nation, an ethnic group or a religion. There exists clear and unambiguous evidence that the violence carried out against

⁸⁰Cited in “Beyond the 1948 Convention -- Emerging principles of Genocide in Customary International Law,” Maryland Journal of International Law and Trade, vol. 17, no. 2, Fall 1993, pp. 193-226.

⁸¹In the United Nations’ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, dated December 11, 1946, Article II defines the following as genocide: Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

*Article II specifies which actions within this scope are punishable: (a) genocide, (b) conspiracy to commit genocide, (c) direct and public incitement to commit genocide, (d) attempt to commit genocide, (e) complicity in genocide.

the Muslims of Bosnia-Hercegovina represents a process of systematic and intentional genocide. Furthermore, the evidence can be clearly documented.”⁸²

Norman Cigar also proposes that, given the overwhelming documentation of both Serbian intent and actual operational execution, the case of Yugoslavia should be re-examined vis-a-vis the definition of genocide:

“Specific intent, though a key aspect of legal proceedings in criminal law, is difficult to prove in most circumstances involving genocide, as perpetrators are often anxious to conceal their actions. Scholars have proposed, instead, that the destruction of a group by “purposive action” be sufficient to qualify an act as genocide. Neither is the complete destruction of a group required for violence to qualify as genocide, as this act would develop by degrees along a continuum.”⁸³

One cannot help but wonder --after years of “early warning” clearly emanating from Serbia proper; Milošević’s ruthless march to power based on a very dangerous brand of hyper-nationalism; the cultural re-coding of an entire society through a relentless media campaign of horrific disinformation; the inevitable unleashing of a terrified Serbian population on its unsuspecting neighbors; and the resultant attempted annihilation of those neighbors and their culture; Why, then, does the international community --and especially the West-- continue to insist that the conflict has been nothing more than an unfortunate quarrel between traditional tribal rivals? Why the hesitancy to call the whole affair as it was (and still is); an intentional, systematic and very nearly successful “genocide” directed at the Bosnian Muslims of former Yugoslavia?

Patrick Glynn offers a very troubling explanation,

“By the fall of 1992, according to several former officials, the State Department had enough evidence to produce a legal finding of “genocide”

⁸²Ali, Rabia and Lifscultz, Lawrence, *Why Bosnia? - Writings on the Bosnian War*, p. 87, Pamphleteer’s Press, Stony Creek, Connecticut, 1993.

⁸³Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia*, p. 8.

against Serbia --but such charges were blocked, for fear the United States would be required to intervene under the 1951 Genocide Convention.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴Patrick Glynn, “See No Evil,” *The New Republic*, p. 26, 25 October 1993.

XI. CONCLUSION

"The current major conflicts taking place along ethnic lines throughout the world have as their main causes not ancient hatreds, but rather the purposeful actions of political actors who actively create violent conflict, selectively drawing on history in order to portray it as historically inevitable."⁸⁵

Serbian President Slobodan Milošević may not stand alone as the sole cause of the ongoing Balkan conflict, but, as this thesis has highlighted, he certainly shoulders a heavy responsibility. Beginning in 1987, he unleashed and rationally manipulated as violent a nationalistic movement as Europe has witnessed since World War II; and ruthlessly guided his decaying nation toward a fleeting vision of "Greater Serbia" --leaving hundreds of thousands dead, and millions of Yugoslavs homeless. Moreover, as a Western diplomat said in the fall of 1995, Milošević not only brutally sacrificed "non-Serbs" in his personal struggle for power, but...

"...cold-bloodedly sacrificed the 170,000 Serbs of the Krajina because he wants a wealthy little country he can rule for 20 years. He never even made a public statement about them. Of course, there's no accountability in the Balkans, but one suspects a day of reckoning must come".⁸⁶

Unfortunately, that day of reckoning, currently embodied in the War Crimes Tribunal, will almost certainly bypass Milošević himself --the "Great Peacemaker" of Dayton-- settling instead on his primary lieutenants, the Bosnian Serbs. Martin Peretz sums up the Serbian President's performance at the recent Dayton Peace talks:

"What possibly could bring about the bonding of Slobodan Milošević, the brute aggressor in the conflict, with Holbrooke and Warren Christopher? Alas, it seems, it didn't take much. Milošević did some singing at the piano, (a rendition of 'Tenderly,' according to the times), he displayed a crass geniality, he was able to silence (temporarily) his more recalcitrant Serbian comrades, he played a splendid game of tennis. And, of course, he had the savvy understanding that what is required now may merely be a decent

⁸⁵Gagnon, "The Case of Serbia", p. 164.

⁸⁶Roger Cohen, "Serbs Of 'Greater Serbia' Find Suffering and Decay," *New York Times*, p. A1, 17 September, 1995.

interval for President Clinton. *Poof, Milošević is no longer accountable for the killings he sponsored*".⁸⁷

Astonishingly, (at least to this author) the Serbian "Pied Piper" himself has been ceremoniously entrusted with the future of Yugoslavia! --The march toward "Greater Serbia" (or now, as one State Department wit termed it, "Greater Serbia Lite") continues.

The message, in this time of post cold war uncertainty and regional volatility, is indeed a dangerous one. As Ivo Banac points out:

"What Milošević has done, and with greater effectiveness than many realize, is to demonstrate that there are no real restrictions on aggressive behavior. This will simply give carte blanche to Milosevics everywhere, of whom there are and will be quite a few."⁸⁸

What, then, might be done to stem this sort of ethnic violence in the future? Clearly, the international community must remain vigilant, recognize the early warning signs of pending regional catastrophe, and act early and decisively with diplomatic, economic, and even military force to curtail the violence.

For the United States, all of the various intelligence agencies --and particularly the State Department-- must train, employ and *trust* their regional desk officers as the eyes and ears America. Unfortunately, in the case of Yugoslavia, despite the efforts of a handful of excellent State Department officers, the frantic predictions of "disaster" were neglected by key decision makers.

Moreover, especially in the case of Yugoslavia, the international community might have checked the spread of paranoia within Serbia proper through an aggressive "information" campaign beginning as early as 1987. Milošević's extensive use of the media was a critical --yet highly vulnerable-- medium for popular mobilization; and a concentrated effort to combat the disinformation spewing forth from Belgrade into the minds of all Serbs throughout the region --an accurate account of events and information-- might have had a profound effect on the calamitous chain of events.

⁸⁷Martin Peretz, *The New Republic*, p. 46, December 18, 1995 (Emphasis added).

⁸⁸Ivo Banac, "Separating History From Myth", in Ali and Lifscultz, *Why Bosnia?*, p. 150.

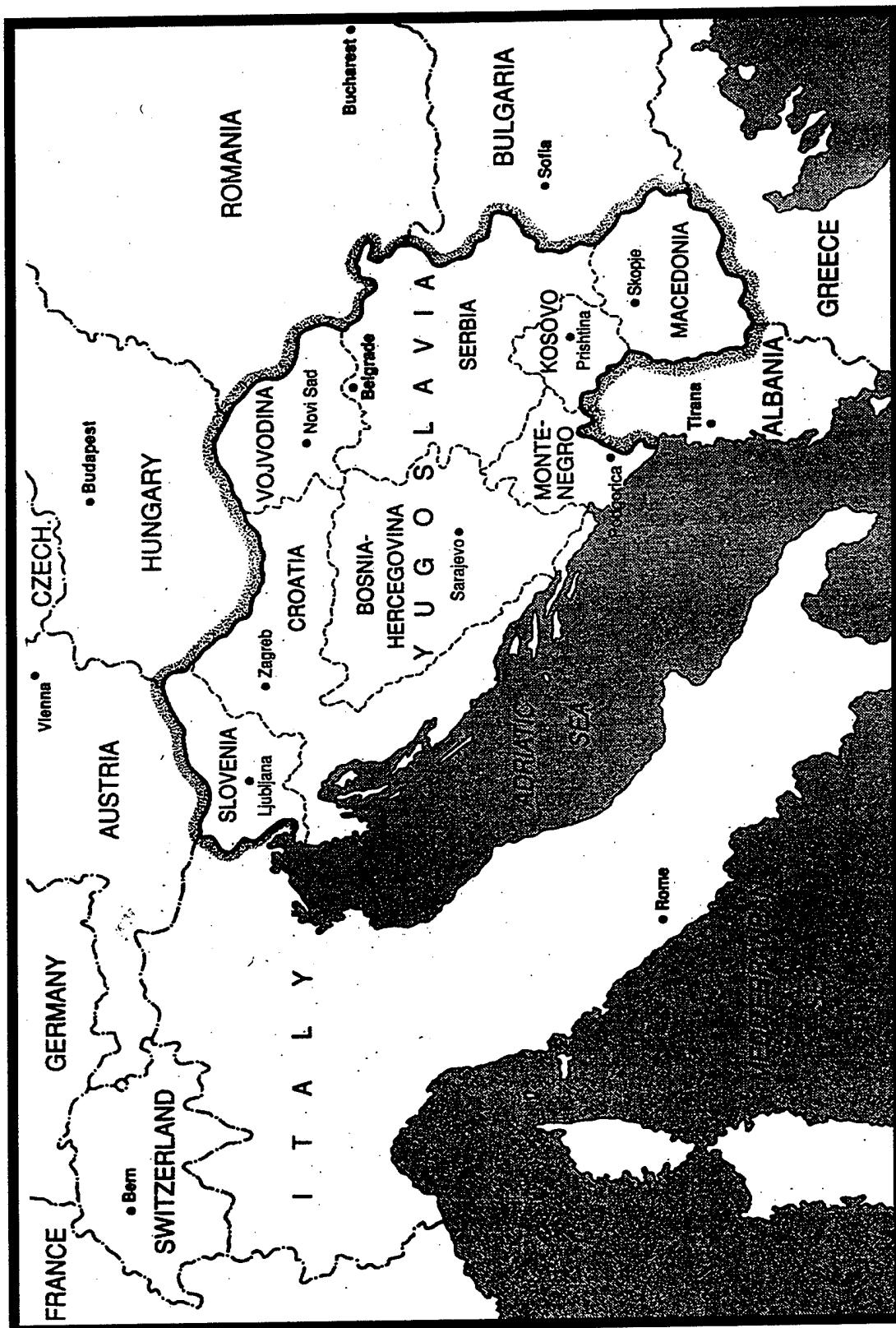
Albert Wohlstetter offers a suggestion as to how the international community might have checked the Serbian nationalist juggernaut,

"A key role could be played by political appeals and accurate political information transmitted... especially over television channels, where most Yugoslavs get their news... it would replace Milošević's TV broadcasts with accurate political and military information, and political appeals to the many Serbs who oppose Milošević's program for a Greater Serbia."⁸⁹

The lessons from the Yugoslav conflict, especially regarding hyper-nationalist manipulation by empowered elites, must not be soon forgotten.

⁸⁹Albert Wohlstetter, "Creating a Greater Serbia," *The New Republic*, p. 26, 1 August 1994.

APPENDIX: MAPS



The Republics of the former Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia in 1990-91





MAP 11.3 -- MILITARY FRONT LINES (MARCH 1994)

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